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Pentagon Papers: An Ugly Picture Of Men, Motives

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Publication of the Pentagon Papers by the New York Times — the "nuclear bomb rocking Washington" — destroys the credibility of more public figures in one stroke than probably any "inside report" in history.

These men stand naked — from President Kennedy and President Johnson to highly regarded academics and career statesmen like the Bundy brothers to cabinet secretaries Rusk and McNamara to military men like generals Westmoreland and Taylor (also an ambassador) and the admirals.

The Kennedy administration, though ultimately spared from major escalation decisions by the death of President Kennedy, transformed the policy of "limited-risk gamble" which it inherited into a "broad commitment" that left LBJ with a choice between more war and withdrawal.

Further, most of the principals in the key decisions of the Johnson administration were men he kept on after Kennedy's death.

WHAT ARE now labeled "the Pentagon Papers" will in some circles be called "McNamara's Folly" — for it was he who ordered the study, apparently deep in the personal depression growing out of his involvement in the whole Vietnam affair.

Surely no President will ever again allow the preparation of such a report by a department of government with access to secret documents. Probably never in modern

times have the facts come to light so quickly after the events — making the excruciating judgment of history even more painful because it comes within the lifetimes and the careers of the men involved.

THE DISCLOSURES of the McNamara-ordered study show that:

U.S. OFFICIALS were much more interested in the American image than about the plight of the South Vietnamese.

POLICY was based to an alarming degree on the so-called domino theory — that if South Vietnam and Laos fell to Communism, so would all Asia — despite a CIA analysis that indicated the theory was nonsense and that only Cambodia if any other country would be affected.

PRESIDENTS get a good range of advice on such critical issues as Vietnam and that leaves them relatively free to choose to do whatever their instincts would have them do.

ONCE THE PRESIDENT has decided on a course of action, all levels of government — career people included — seem ready to bend every effort to support and justify the decision.

PRESIDENTS and their advisers are willing to lie endlessly to the American public, to Congress, to the world — if lying seems in their own short-range self-interest.

"THE PENTAGON Papers" cement many impressions:

IT WAS "Alice in Wonderland" in Saigon — as the Pentagon analyst described it — in the period when LBJ decided that he had to give all-out support to the feeble South Vietnam government, no matter what the consequences of such action were to be.

LIFE WITH LBJ in the White House during those days were like living with a collection of speed freaks. Action begat action begat action — each heating up the war and each moving to a new level of danger. And — always — the attempt to move without letting the public or Congress know what was going on.

Adding to the hectic nature of the play was the constant changing of the principals by Johnson as he named new generals, new ambassadors, new advisers.

THE SANEST man in the whole ugly drama appears to have been Undersecretary of State George Ball who said:

In the beginning: "Don't do it."

Later: "If you do, you'll be sorry."

Still later: "Stop. Never mind your losses — get out!"

THE "NEXT SANEST" was CIA Director John McCone who predicted that bombing the North would make them more determined, not force them to negotiate; then predicted that a U.S. ground war would only repeat Korea's mistake.

The CIA generally comes off with good marks — its assessments of both military and political situations seems to have been excellent.

It's noteworthy because so many peace advocates have blamed the CIA for many of the problems the U.S. has faced in recent years.

THE 47-VOLUMES of the Pentagon Papers show this picture of the principals:

ROBERT McNAMARA — interested only in how to do it better — no matter what "it" was: bombing, maneuvering, reporting, use of materials

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and men. No strong opinions about what "should" be done, judging by the documents in the study.

DEAN RUSK — a man still living in the "contain China" days, the last remnant of the philosophy of former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

THE BUNDY BROTHERS — they suggested almost every possible course of action — at one time or another. William Bundy, the one at the State Department, had talent for finding "middle ground" between the extremes of "do nothing" and "all-out war".

As events unfolded, the alternatives got closer and closer together — but he seemed always to be able to find a new "middle ground." His view often prevailed — making U.S. policy therefore appear to be an endless series of "half steps" toward all-out war.

McGEORGE BUNDY, probably LBJ's closest adviser on the war and considered the principal architect of Vietnam policy, was more concerned with protecting LBJ's image than the quality of advice he gave the President.

He toned down the "bomb now" panic reports of others, but when he went to Saigon to investigate personally for LBJ, McGeorge Bundy was seized by the "we must do something" fever that eventually afflicted everyone but

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Editorials

Outlawed Or Not, Our Use Of Mercenaries Continues

The secret war in northern Laos — secret because it violates a 1962 neutrality agreement which the United States endorsed — goes on unabated. At the expense of the United States, 4,800 Thai mercenaries and 32,000 Meo tribesmen, trained by the CIA, fight Communists.

U. S. involvement in this kind of war-by-proxy was supposed to have been stopped by an amendment which Congress inserted in the foreign aid appropriations bill last year.

But it hasn't stopped. In fact, according to Sen. Stuart W. Symington (D-Mo.), the Nixon administration wants to step up the pace of activity in Laos and has asked for \$374 million in economic and military aid for this little country next year. This would be far more than the administration has ever admitted.

In a 3½-hour closed session of the Senate Monday, Symington, J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) and Clifford P. Case (R-N. J.) are said to have demanded that the administration come clean with Congress and the American people on what is happening in northern Laos.

Meanwhile, the Nixon administration does not bolster its credibility with its legalistic justification of a mercenary operation which Congress sought specifically to outlaw.

Before the Senate went into secret session Monday, the State Department declared that the employment of Thai "volunteers" in north-

ern Laos was "fully consistent with all pertinent legislation."

How could this be?

Because, the State Department said, the mercenary program already was in effect when the legislation to stop it was passed.

Do contracts with Thailand and deals between the CIA and Meo tribesmen take precedence over laws passed by Congress?

President Nixon's State Department evidently thinks so.